



## South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



# FOUR CHAPLAINS MEMORIAL SERVICE

The VA Black Hills Health Care System (VABHHCS) encourages everyone to participate in the observance of the National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans and the Four Chaplains memorial service on Sunday, February 10. The service will be held at 1:30 pm (MT) at the St. Francis of Assisi Parish Church in Sturgis (1049 Howard Street).

The National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans gives community members a chance to let those who have given so much to the nation know that they are not forgotten.

The Four Chaplains Memorial Service honors four Army Chaplains – Lt. George L. Fox, Methodist; Lt. Alexander D. Goode, Jewish; Lt. John P. Washington, Roman Catholic; and Lt. Clark V. Poling, Reformed Church of America, - who gave up their life jackets and lives so that younger soldiers could live when the USS Dorchester was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine, February 3, 1943.

Area veterans' organizations provide wreaths to be laid by different branches of the military and the veterans' organizations, as a symbol of those who have given their lives.

Following the program, a chili supper will be held at the Sturgis Veterans Club (868 Main Street).

More information on the Four Chaplains Memorial can be found at: <http://www.fourchaplains.org/story.html>.



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## SENATE CONFIRMS ZIMMERMAN AS SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

This week, the South Dakota Senate confirmed Larry Zimmerman as the state's first Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

"I am humbled to serve the Governor and this great state of South Dakota," said Zimmerman. "Serving the seventy thousand veterans of this state is an added bonus to this position."

Zimmerman reviewed his mission and vision statements with his department staff this week and emphasized that these new set of statements would be the cornerstone of the department's competencies to build strategic plans.

The past two weeks he has spent time meeting with legislators, the Governor's staff and fellow cabinet members. Zimmerman plans to hit the road soon and visit the veterans service organizations, the County and Tribal Veterans Service officers and South Dakota's veterans and their families.

## NEW COUNTY VSOS

Dewey County has selected Robert Dunsmore as their County Veterans Service Officer. Dunsmore replaces Tom McClelland. Mr. Dunsmore also serves as the Tribal Veterans Service Officer for the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. Dunsmore will be working in the Dewey County Office on Wednesdays from 1:00—5:00 pm.

Union County has selected Daniel Veatch as their new County Veterans Service Officer. Veatch replaces Ronald Jenkins who recently retired. The Union County VSO office will be open from 8:30 am—4:30 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

"We look forward to working with Mr. Dunsmore and Mr. Veatch as they assist and counsel South Dakota's veterans," said Director Claussen.

## DEPARTMENT HOSTS VETERAN LEGISLATORS

This week Lt Governor Michels, Secretary Zimmerman and Deputy Secretary Harding hosted veteran legislators and members of the legislative leadership. They used this opportunity to thank them for their service to this great country and to brief them on Department activities. Much of the time focused on a briefing on the new State Veterans Home.

## VA AND ANCESTRY.COM PARTNER TO INDEX HISTORIC BURIAL RECORDS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has partnered with the internet-based genealogy research firm Ancestry.com to bring burial records from historic national cemetery ledgers into the digital age. The effort will make the collection—predominantly of Civil War interments—accessible to researchers and Ancestry.com subscribers undertaking historical and genealogical research.

“We are excited to be able to share this wealth of primary documentation,” said VA’s Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Steve L. Muro. “With the help of Ancestry.com, we have opened the doors to thousands of service members’ histories through the information contained in these burial ledgers.”

From the 1860s until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, U.S. Army personnel tracked national cemetery burials in hand-written burial ledgers or “registers.” Due to concern for the fragile documents and a desire to expand public access to the ledger contents, VA’s National Cemetery Administration (NCA) duplicated about 60 hand-written ledgers representing 36 cemeteries using a high-resolution scanning process. The effort resulted in high quality digital files that reproduced approximately 9,344 pages and 113,097 individual records. NCA then transferred the original ledgers to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) where they will be preserved. In addition to the NCA’s ledgers, NARA was already the steward of at least 156 military cemetery ledgers transferred from the Army years ago.

In 2011, NCA initiated a partnership with Ancestry.com to index its cemetery ledgers, allowing the data to be searched or browsed in a variety of ways. Ancestry.com spent more than 600 hours indexing NCA’s records at no charge to the government.

Ancestry.com has assembled the digitized and indexed NCA burial ledgers with those at NARA into a new collection, “U.S. Burial Registers, Military Posts and National Cemeteries, 1862-1960.” The burial records contain information such as name, rank, company/regiment, date of death, age at death, date of burial and grave number. A large number of Civil War soldiers were buried where they fell in battle or in temporary cemeteries, and sometimes that information, along with religious affiliation, can be found in the ledgers.

The collection was posted on the ancestry.com website on Veterans Day 2012. The information can be accessed free of charge by VA personnel as well as by employees of the other federal agencies that maintain national cemeteries, the Departments of the Interior and Defense. Ledger data will also be available for free at all NARA facilities, and at public libraries that subscribe to Ancestry.com. NCA cemetery staff will use the database to answer requests from the public. The general public will have access to the database on their personal devices through Ancestry.com’s regular subscription service.

This partnership between Ancestry.com and NCA supports NCA’s ongoing Civil War 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration (2011-2015). For more information on this project, contact Sara Amy Leach (sara.leach@va.gov), NCA senior historian.



## VA REQUIRED TO START BURN PITS REGISTRY

On January 10, 2013, President Obama signed a new law (S 3202) that calls for the establishment of open burn pit registry. This new law requires the VA to establish a burn pits registry for veterans who may have been exposed to burn pits in Iraq or Afghanistan. Once the registry is available, the VA will announce how veterans can sign up.

The VA hopes the new registry will enhance their ability to monitor the effects of exposure and keep veterans informed about studies and treatments. Visit the link below to review studies the VA is conducting on possible health effects from burn pit exposure.

(<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/health-effects-studies.asp>)

The VA hopes that the registry data will help them understand and respond to these health problems more effectively. Veterans should contact their local VA Environmental Health Coordinator about getting a Gulf War Registry health exam.

This comprehensive health exam includes an exposure and medical history, laboratory tests, and a physical exam. A VA health professional will discuss the results face-to-face with the veteran and in a follow-up letter.

Important points about registry health exams:

- ♦ Free to eligible veterans and no co-payment
- ♦ Not a disability compensation exam or required for other VA benefits
- ♦ Enrollment in VA's health care system not necessary
- ♦ Based on veterans' recollection of service, not on their military records
- ♦ Veterans can receive additional registry exams, if new problems develop
- ♦ Veterans' family members are not eligible for registry exams

Veterans who served in the Gulf during the 1990-1991 Gulf War, Operation Desert Shield, Operation Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom, or Operation New Dawn are eligible for the Gulf War Registry examination and do not need to be enrolled in VA health care to take part.

More to follow!





# Upcoming Events

Feb. 4—VFW Legislative Reception  
Feb. 5—American Legion Legislative Reception  
Feb. 7—SDNG Legislative Dining Out  
Feb. 8-10—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Cedar Shores in Oacoma  
Feb 10—Four Chaplains Memorial Service—St Francis Assissi Church—Sturgis—1:30 pm  
Feb. 9—SFVAHCS Valentines for Veterans Concert—Washington Pavilion—Sioux Falls, SD—3:00 pm  
Mar. 14—VABHHCS Veterans Creative Arts Show—Fort Meade  
Apr. 1—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am  
May 3-5—DAV State Convention—The Lodge—Deadwood  
Jul. 1—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am  
Oct. 1—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am

## VA ANNOUNCES NEW ONLINE RESOURCES FOR FUNERAL DIRECTORS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced this week the availability of their new online funeral directors resource kit. Funeral directors nationwide may use the kit when helping veterans and their families make burial arrangements in VA national cemeteries.

The website was created to enable funeral directors to find the most pertinent information to help families plan burials and apply for VA memorial benefits quickly. It has links about eligibility, benefits and services plus videos and information regarding services offered with and without military funeral honors. The website is available at <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/funeraldirector.asp>.



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